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ABSTRACT

This chapter responds to an article by Claire Kramsch on the privilege of nonnative speakers. It agrees with Kramsch that in second language teaching, there is no single standard of native speaker language to target, since the cultural and linguistic reality of a given language is too complex and multifaceted to allow identification of characterization of a target language norm and ideal native speaker. It agrees that learners should understand that language standards are multiple, not monolithic, but it differs from Kramsch in how this language might best intersect with basic knowledge of the language. It notes that Kramsch attacks the notion of a monolithic identity of the target culture, but fails to recognize that the FL learner discourse community is also multiplex, with each learner bringing both common and different experiences and background to the learning context. It notes that Kramsch proposes that teachers teach the language as a social and cultural practice, but does not explain how to do this or what these terms mean in concrete classroom practice. Finally, it questions Kramsch's goal of elevating the status and contributory potential of nonnative learners in the learning process so that they are not depicted as passive beings who wait to be provided with correct answers that they will then commit to memory. (SM)

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Privilege of the Nonnative Speaker Meets Practical Needs of the Language Teacher

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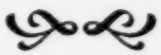

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One of the principal roles that applied linguists often assume is that of intermediary between the worlds of the second language acquisition theorist-researcher and the second/foreign language teacher-practitioner. The applied linguist takes concepts and discoveries concerning language and language acquisition and helps practitioners apply them to classroom-based language teaching. The mediation between these two worlds is a complex affair; issues raised by theorists may be interesting and thought-provoking, but often fail to respond to the practical needs of language teachers. The issues raised by Kramsch are a case in point, and we examine some of them here.

First, *if the native speaker is not to be considered the model for learners to emulate, then who should provide that linguistic model?* We agree with Kramsch that there is no single standard of native-speaker language to target, since the cultural and linguistic reality of a given language is far too complex and multi-faceted for us to identify or characterize a "target language norm" and an "ideal native speaker." The notion that most nonnative learners can one day become "native-like" if they keep studying and practicing is at best naïve and at worst narrow-minded, because there is no single standard of native-speaker language towards which to strive.

But if one follows this line of thinking, then the teachers and learners of a foreign language are left (1) without a target language norm, and (2) with an unrealizable dream of becoming native-like speakers. These two notions render any efforts in the FL classroom unproductive

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and meaningless. Without a native-speaker norm to teach to, the task of teaching and learning the L2 is unmanageable. To grasp the FL in all its complexity is problematic, perhaps impossibly so, for students with a limited command of the linguistic code. For example, Kramsch's analysis of the "Bon Marché" advertisement through multiple readings is not something that can be fully appreciated in the absence of adequate linguistic knowledge. The multiple readings would be best addressed slowly as learners increase their experiences with the target language and culture, so that the multi-faceted aspects of a text are not overwhelming.

Kramsch raises the need to acknowledge various speech communities and to understand that the "native speakers" of those communities are those recognized as such by other community members. We agree that learners should understand that language standards are multiple, not monolithic. We differ from Kramsch, however, in how this knowledge might best intersect with a basic knowledge of the language. If one is to teach the FL using these various speech communities as a base, several problems arise. For example, in the case of Spanish, the language is undergoing rapid change world-wide, especially in border regions like the southwestern U.S. As researchers such as Sánchez (1994), Silva-Corvalán (1994), and Valdés (2000) have shown, this particular speech community represents a continuum of language change that is fraught with contradictions and complexities. Some members, even among the younger generations, claim to be native Spanish speakers, yet outside the U.S. they would rarely be recognized as such. Consequently, their language norms are not legitimized as the standard norm or recognized as having any status at all outside their own speech community. Even more problematic, these speakers represent the speech community with which most of the nonnative learners, at least in certain regions of the U.S., will probably come most frequently into contact.

Second, *if there are multiple interpretations of a given text or body of discourse, to what extent does the teacher allow interpretations outside of those recognized by the target speech community at large? How can a learner, who lacks the same background knowledge and experiences of the native-speaker discourse community, reach the understanding intended by the speaker/writer for the native-speaker audience?* Kramsch attacks the notion of a monolithic identity of the target culture but fails to recognize that the FL learner discourse community is also multiplex, with each learner bringing both common and different experiences and background knowledge to the learning context. Their experiences and knowledge will undoubtedly lead them to interpretations that stray from those understood by native speakers. Kramsch

implies that teachers should acknowledge learners' language and their interpretations of FL discourse, but she offers no suggestions as to how the teachers might proceed in filling in the cultural and experiential gap to reach FL perspectives, especially if the teacher is to present multiple FL perspectives.

Third, *Kramsch proposes that teachers teach the language as a social and cultural practice. But how does a teacher do this? What do these terms mean in concrete classroom practice?* The author states that "language has traditionally been seen as a standardized system, not as a social and cultural practice. Viewing language as a practice may lead to a rethinking . . . a discovery of how learners construct for themselves a linguistic and social identity that enables them to resolve the anomalies and contradictions they are likely to encounter when attempting to adopt someone else's language" (p. 360).

The only concrete pedagogical suggestions Kramsch offers are those of "memorizing and performing prose and verse, of playing with language and writing multilingual poetry at the beginning of language instruction" and, for the more advanced learners, "exercises in translation and in comparative stylistics" (p. 368). One cannot argue with the value of encouraging learners to discover for themselves the enjoyment of creating nuanced meaning in another language and working toward the construction of a new identity in the target language and culture. The teacher, however, is still left with the question of how to lead learners to work with the language as a social and cultural practice, especially in the absence of an authentic interaction with native speakers in the target culture environment.

Finally, *Kramsch's closing paragraph lauding the "multiple possibilities for self-expression in language" (p. 368) brings us back full circle to the first question posed in this reply.* Her goal is to elevate the status and contributory potential of nonnative learners in the learning process so that they are not depicted as passive beings who, *tabula rasa*, wait to be provided with correct answers that they will then commit to memory. Although this point is laudable, it invokes a model that is egocentric rather than focused on working toward a mastery and deeper understanding of the FL and culture. Thus, learners should forego the notion of working to become as proficient as possible in the foreign language according to some kind of recognized norm, and rely on the teacher to provide the norm and the activities that will lead them to discover a new linguistic and cultural identity "on the margins of monolingual speakers' territories" (p. 368). They must depend on their own learners' discourse community that will somehow generate the kinds of interactions that will lead them to this mastery and understanding of the FL and culture. That this discourse community

could be called such is questionable since its members probably do not have shared intuitions about the FL. But Kramsch proposes that it can provide the backdrop for learning the FL as a social and cultural practice. If this approach to learning a FL is truly functional and effective, then one wonders how learners are to develop an integrative motivation to appropriate the FL and its culture as part of their own identities.

We await Kramsch's responses to these questions.

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